


Texas Department of Health

The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

March 25, 2002

TDH Hot Topics



Federal Grants for Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response.

In late February, TDH completed the grant application for the \$8.3 million phase 1 of the Bioterrorism Hospital Preparedness Program from the Health Resources and Services Administration. First on the list is to be a needs assessment of 20 percent of the approximately 550 hospitals in Texas to gauge their bioterrorism readiness. Also, the TDH Bioterrorism Work Group finishing up work on the proposal to the CDC for implementing its \$52 million cooperative agreement to Texas. This work will include proposals in six focus areas and is being closely coordinated with our local partners. The expectation is that TDH will propose plans for using about \$15 million for agency projects including laboratory capacity, the Health Alert Network and epidemiology and surveillance. The other \$36 million is proposed to be allocated for local and regional public health preparedness and response. About 75 percent of this amount will go to local health departments and the other 25 percent to regional offices serving in their capacity as local health departments. *For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Birth Registry Earns "A".

The Trust for America's Health (TFAH) has rated the Texas Birth Defects Registry as one of the best birth defects surveillance systems in the country. Texas was one of eight states given an "A" by this Washington-based environmental advocacy group. This story has received considerable attention in the media. *For more information, contact Mark Canfield, at (512) 458-7232 or e-mail mark.canfield@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Children More Overweight.

Preliminary data indicates that Texas children are more overweight than children in other states. These early results are from one of several projects funded by TDH to help identify the causes of obesity statewide and to develop effective strategies for reducing the number of overweight children. More than 50 percent of Hispanic boys and African-American girls in the 4th grade are overweight; 4th graders are more overweight than 8th and 11th graders; and boys are more overweight than girls. *(Note: Data from the Texas study is preliminary. To date, the grantee has collected data from approximately half of the state. For more information, contact Suzanne Sparks at (512) 458-7297 or e-mail suzanne.sparks@tdh.state.tx.us.*



More TB in Texas.

The number of reported tuberculosis cases in Texas was up 9 percent in 2001 with a total of 1,643 cases reported to TDH. This is an increase of 137 cases over 2000's total of 1,506 cases. This reverses a trend of steady declines since 1994. World TB Day was

observed on Saturday (3-24) with special activities planned in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Harlingen, Houston and San Antonio. Details are available on the TB web site. *For more information, contact Jeff Taylor or Ann Tyree, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail jeff.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us or ann.tyree@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Pertussis Rising; Infant Dies.

A one-month-old Madison County infant was the first reported pertussis-related death in Texas this year. She died on February 8 after three days of hospitalization. The infant had a paroxysmal cough, inspiratory whoop, post-tussive vomiting, apnea, and cyanosis after paroxysm. Pertussis, called whooping cough, was confirmed by a nasopharyngeal specimen. The infant had been seen by physicians four times at three clinics prior to the Emergency Room visit that resulted in hospital admission.

Since Jan. 1, there have been 45 reported cases of pertussis in Central Texas (19 confirmed and 26 probable). Some of the patients visited hospitals in Walker County in Region 6/5S. To educate local physicians about pertussis, the regional epidemiology program created a public health advisory addressing the number of cases, disease definition, lab information, and recommendations for treatment and prevention. It was disseminated through the local health authority and the county medical society.

A total of 569 confirmed cases and 24 probable cases of pertussis were reported in Texas for 2001. In 2000 there were 327 reported cases, and in 1999, there were 152 cases. One infant death was reported in 1999, and two infant deaths were reported for 2000. Eight of the nine infants who died are Hispanic. In most of these cases, symptomatic close contacts were identified, and often included adult or adolescent household members with onset prior to the infant. Changes in reporting practices may account for some of the increase in reported cases, but corresponding increases in infant deaths and the number of laboratory-confirmed and hospitalized cases provide strong evidence of a resurgence of pertussis in communities across Texas. *For more information, contact Laura Tabony or David Bastis, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7284, or e-mail laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Disparities Task Force Members Appointed.

All nine members of the Texas Health Disparities Task Force have been appointed: three members by the Governor, three by the Lieutenant Governor, and three by the Speaker of the House. The Task Force, created by HB 757, was established to assist TDH in eliminating health and health access disparities among multicultural, disadvantaged, and regional populations; and in reorganizing TDH programs to eliminate disparities. Adela D. Valdez, M.D., who is Regional Assistant Dean of the Regional Academic Health Center, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and Coordinator of the Regional Academic Health Center at Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen, was appointed by Governor Perry to serve as the Presiding Officer. First meeting of the task force is planned for April. *For more information, contact Martha McGlothlin, Office of Deputy Commissioner for Programs, at (512) 458-7437 or e-mail martha.mcglathlin@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Acting Director of the Office of Minority Health.

Judy Garner has been selected to serve as Acting Director of the Office of Minority Health, effective March 1. Judy has been with TDH since 1994 and most recently served as the head of the Health and Human Services Job Center. The position is expected to be posted by April 1 and will be competed and filled. Kevin Collins, the Director of the

Office of Minority Health, resigned in February to accept a position with CDC. *For more information, contact Martha McGlothlin, Office of Deputy Commissioner for Programs, at (512) 458-7437 or e-mail martha.mcglathlin@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health & Human Services Consolidation Efforts.

TDH has been named the lead agency to implement consolidation of Human Resources across all Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) agencies. This is one of seven consolidation initiatives launched by HHSC with the purpose of pooling the resources of multiple agencies to increase efficiency and to streamline business operations. A plan for HR consolidation will be developed by June 1 with implementation by September 1. Senate Bill 1, Rider 21 of the 77th Legislature required the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the business processes of all HHS agencies under its purview with the goal of consolidating support services systems. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associate Commissioner for Operational, at (512) 458-7720 or e-mail wanda.Thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Review of the Requirements for Rabies Immunization Intervals for Dogs and Cats.

TDH is in the process of reviewing the requirements for rabies immunization intervals for dogs and cats in Texas. There will be an opportunity for public comment during the public meetings scheduled throughout the state between March 26th and June 4th. Written comments may be submitted by June 4, to the Zoonosis Control Division or by e-mailing Rabies.Control@tdh.state.tx.us. *For more information, contact Dr. Jane Mahlow, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail jane.mahlow@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Disease Outbreaks / Investigations



Meningitis Update.

There has been a significant decrease in the number of Meningococcal Disease in Texas due in part to vaccination and public education conducted by TDH last season. During the same time period last year there were 2 outbreaks and 45 cases in Region 6/5S. From Oct. 1, 2001 to Mar 4, 2002, the Region 6/5S Epidemiology Program has received 18 cases of Meningococcal Disease in the region. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Epidemiology Manager, at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

In conjunction with the Harris County Health Department, an investigation was opened on four cases of acute hepatitis B occurring in a nursing home. A serologic study of all resident and staff for hepatitis B and hepatitis C found 7 residents, and 1 staff person were surface antigen positive. Four residents and 9 staff were HCV positive. In an effort to determine common exposure links, the surface antigen specimens were sent for antigen typing. Chart reviews and staff questionnaires are being conducted. *For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Cluster Investigations.

Three suspected cluster investigations were initiated in February. Twenty-nine requests for cancer data were received during the month. The meeting with the Corpus Christi citizen's group (Citizen's for Environmental Justice) was cancelled. Rescheduling will be coordinated at a later date. *For more information, contact Melanie Williams, at (512) 458-7523 or e-mail melanie.williams@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Foodborne Outbreaks.

Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance (IDEAS) staff completed an investigation of *E. coli* O157 infections in a West Texas town. Eleven people tested positive for the pathogen and an additional nine were confirmed by epidemiological evaluation. This is a large number of cases for one small city during a week; on average, there are about 100 cases of this infection reported statewide per year. It is likely that iceberg lettuce was the cause of the infections. The investigation is continuing to determine the source of the contaminated lettuce. In a hepatitis A outbreak in North Texas identified in February, all school children in grades PreK through grade 3 were offered hepatitis A vaccine. This is an effective approach to stop transmission of hepatitis A. *For more information, contact Linda Gaul, Staff Epidemiologist, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Tarrant County Investigating.

Diphtheria has been ruled out, but Tarrant County Health Department is continuing to investigate an undiagnosed, but presumed infectious disease. A 37-year old woman from South Lake was diagnosed with viral pharyngitis and placed on analgesic-antipyretics by her family physician on February 17. When her condition did not improve, she was referred to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT). On February 20, the patient was admitted to Baylor Grapevine Medical Center Intensive Care under strict isolation orders. Prophylactic medications were ordered for family members. The ENT physician called CDC to request diphtheria antitoxin. Significant findings on physical examination included low-grade fever and mild cervical lymphadenopathy. There was a foul smell from the mouth with grayish-green membrane and ulceration over the tonsils and soft palate. Rapid strep and mono tests were negative but CDC advised a potassium hydroxide prep and electrocardiogram. Throat swabs and membrane were collected and sent for culture, and also for polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The patient is originally from Turkey. There is no known history of recent international travel or exposure to diphtheria but the patient's mother also from Turkey has been visiting for two months. She visited Sri Lanka before arrival in the United States. Tarrant County Health Department continues to investigate. *For information, contact Laura Tabony or David Bastis, Immunization Division, Surveillance Epidemiology Program, (512) 458-7284 or e-mail at laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Chagas' Disease.

Canine deaths from Chagas' disease in the Beeville area have prompted concern about the vectors, kissing bugs (*Triatoma* species), and human exposure. *Triatoma sanguisuga* inflicting human bites has been submitted. Specimen was negative for the causative agent, *Trypanosoma cruzi*. In general, about one-third of the bugs submitted to our lab are positive for trypanosomes. According to a local physician, additional specimens are expected. *For more information, contact Eldridge Hutcheson, Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7318 or e-mail eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



Cancer Incidence Reporting.

Approximately 7,500 letters are being mailed to Texas physicians notifying them of recent amendments to the Cancer Incidence Reporting Act. The legislation expands the reporting of cancer to include physicians and dentists in addition to entities such as clinical laboratories and health care facilities, which already report. The letter includes a copy of the recent legislation and solicits physicians' opinions on the best method for

gathering information on these previously unreported cases. The response has been positive and suggestions are currently being received. *For more information, contact Nancy Weiss, at (512) 458-7523 or e-mail nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Collaborative Research Project.

The Texas Cancer Registry is working with Texas A&M Rural School of Public Health on a collaborative research project examining childhood cancer and pesticide exposure. *For more information, contact Melanie Williams, at (512) 458-7523 or e-mail melanie.williams@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Video Covers Common STDs Among Youth.

A 30-minute video discussing the most common STDs among youth has been made available to Texas school administrators and staff through a collaboration of The Texas Workers Compensation Commission (TWCC) and the Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention. TWCC had already produced the video series *Safety in the Schools*. The video also covers the financial and long-term health impact of STDs on a community as well as additional resources available for referrals. It also provides information in-service trainings and other curricula to address the growing concern of STDs and Youth. The video was made available to schools with satellite downlink capability on February 19. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535 or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Newborn Screening Reports Abnormal Lab Results.

The Newborn Screening Branch reported the following critically abnormal laboratory screen results to the Newborn Screening follow-up team of nurses: 28 elevated phenylalanine results indicating possible Phenylketonuria, 99 elevated galactose results indicating possible Galactosemia, 45 abnormal T4/TSH results indicating possible Hypothyroidism, 30 clinically significant possible Hemoglobinopathies, and 5 elevated 17-OHP results indicating possible Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. The Hemoglobinopathy Screening laboratory reported one possible elevated A1c whole blood result, indicating possible diabetes. *For more information, contact Eldridge Hutcheson, Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7318 or e-mail eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Tobacco Use in Texas Colleges.

Discussions are underway with Texas Tech University to conduct surveys of college students in Texas to assess their tobacco use behaviors. College students are a market specifically being targeted by the tobacco industry. The survey may be a web-based or an e-mail survey with appropriate incentives to increase participation. Texas would be the first state in the nation to use this method to reach this population. *For more information, contact Dr Philip Huang, Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention, at (512) 458-7200 or e-mail philip.huang@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Health Steps & Title V Abnormal Lab Results.

The Clinical Chemistry Branch reported the following abnormal laboratory test results to Texas Health Steps and Title V medical providers: 713 children's specimens had blood lead levels greater than or equal to 10 µg/dL indicating possible lead poisoning, and 14 children had more blood lead than the medically critical value of 40 µg/dL; 1143 children's specimens had total hemoglobin levels of less than 11 g/dL indicating possible anemia, and three children had less total hemoglobin than the medically critical value of 7 g/dL; nine children had clinically significant hemoglobinopathies, three medical providers were called with possible elevated Hb A1c results; 73 children had

serum cholesterol levels greater than or equal to 200 mg/dL indicating possible hyperlipidemia. *For more information, contact Eldridge Hutcheson, Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7318 or e-mail eldridge.hutcheson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH Retrieving Mammograms.

The TDH Bureau of Radiation Control (BRC) is helping Texas women obtain mammography records from the PHYMED Specialty Center Inc., a company that closed its radiology clinics in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and filed for bankruptcy in 2001. The group provided radiology services for six major HMOs and also possessed medical records from Kaiser Permanente. Since December, BRC has received more than 70 complaints from patients who have not been able to get their mammograms. Area HMOs indicate that the number of women trying to access records is much higher.

As a short-term solution, BRC is managing each complaint like a records request. Patient names and birth dates are forwarded to PHYMED, which then provides a medical record number and the site where records are located. This data is forwarded to radiation control personnel who visit the locations and obtain records. When the records arrive in the regional office, an administrative assistant contacts patients to let them know their records are ready for pick-up. The process was established in cooperation with the Attorney General's office, the TDH Office of General Counsel, Region 2/3 and a PHYMED representative. TDH has also requested that PHYMED provide a comprehensive patient list. When the list is received, BRC will contact medical clinics near each location. These clinics will be asked to take possession of the mammography records and make them available for patients in their community. *For more information, contact Jerry Cogburn, at (512) 834-6688, ext.2037 or e-mail jerry.cogburn@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Male Involvement Programs Receive Training.

TDH Office of Special Projects provided training to five male involvement projects in Austin, in collaboration with the Office of Population Affairs and the evaluator from Baylor College of Medicine. Attendees traveled to the "XY Zone," home of Austin's project at Johnston High School. Project coordinators met with staff and students to familiarize themselves with this school based pregnancy prevention project. Dr. Tim Peterson, an Austin chiropractor came to discuss "Men's Health." A fall grant-writing workshop is planned. *For more information, contact Norma Alvarez, Special Projects Coordinator, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796, ext. 2017 or e-mail norma.alvarez@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HIPAA Estimates.

TDH estimates that fulfilling obligations for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) will cost about \$3.8 million (\$2 million in FY02 + \$1.8 million in FY03). This estimate is a "work in progress" and will not be finalized until assessment, fit gap analysis, compliance planning, and top executive approval are received. Senate Bill 1, HIPAA Rider, 77th session, mandates certain state agencies -- including TDH -- provide a progress report and cost estimates to the Governor's Office, LBB, and the Legislature on this issue by September 1. At HHSC's request, TDH developed early, high-level cost estimates for HIPAA EDI and Privacy only. To date, specific funding to comply with the HIPAA federal mandate has not been provided.

In 1996, Congress passed HIPAA legislation aimed at standardizing health-related electronic billing transactions and protecting the privacy of individually identifiable health information. HIPAA has four distinct stages: Transactions Electronic Data Interchange (EDI), Privacy, Security, and National Identifiers. TDH is vigorously

pursuing HIPAA assessment, fit gap analysis, and compliance planning/implementation. TDH is working in close coordination and collaboration with the Health & Human Services Commission's (HHSC) HIPAA Project Management Office. *For more information, contact Mary Jane Berry, Office of Agency Information Systems Projects, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6305 or e-mail maryjane.berry@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Commissioner's Challenge.

TDH staff are working with the Texas Department on Aging to see if a program similar to the agency's "Commissioner Challenge" could be started in multiple state agencies as part of the Texercise program. TDH staff are also working adapting this program for communities. The 2001 Commissioner's Challenge, recently completed at TDH, had 190 staff participants, with 60 percent of the participants meeting or exceeding their individual goal. Thirty-eight 5-member teams participated. *For more information, contact Jennifer Smith, Cardiovascular Health and Wellness, at (512) 458-7670 or e-mail jennifer.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HIV Prevention Among Crack Users.

Staff from the HIV/STD Epidemiology Division worked with staff from the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) and from the CARE Unit of Austin-Travis County Mental Health-Mental Retardation on a demonstration project for HIV prevention among crack users in East Austin. Staff negotiated a contract with TCADA to fund this project and facilitated the creation of a logic model for the project, showing the issues to be addressed by the intervention and the long and short-term outcomes to be evaluated. *For more information, contact Sharon K. Melville, Director, HIV/STD Epidemiology Division, at (512) 490-2545 or e-mail sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us; or Shirley Broussard, HIV/STD Planning Branch, at (512) 490-2525 or e-mail shirley.broussard@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Vaccines for Children Program—Provider Enrollment.

Physician assistants will be able to sign the enrollment form for the Texas Vaccines for Children Program (TVFC), pending finalization of a memorandum. The request to sign was made by the Texas Academy of Physician Assistants. The TVFC is changing the way it conducts the annual provider re-enrollment campaign. In the past, providers, public health regions, and local health departments have had to drop routine work and complete enrollment paperwork within a four-month time frame. Now, clinic sites will complete the paperwork in conjunction with a quality improvement site visit. Providers will have assistance in completing the paperwork. Public health regions and local health departments will save work time in collecting and reviewing data submitted on the forms, and the data quality will be improved. *For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, Texas Vaccines for Children Program, at (512) 452-7284 or e-mail jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Update on 3rd Party Vaccine Distribution.

On February 13, a meeting was held for interested vendors to ask questions concerning the RFP for third party vaccine distribution. Staff from two vendors --GIV and Bell -- were present. PICS is an automated system being developed for the Pharmacy Division that will track all items shipped from the pharmacy to the end-user. This system will also assist with inventory control of all products. The system will work with other automated systems within the department to enhance vaccine management as well as other programs the Pharmacy Division serves. Bids for this contract were due March 7, 2:00 P.M. CST. The goal is to award the contract in mid-April and to begin phasing in direct shipments to all immunization providers by mid-June, with all TVFC enrolled providers receiving direct vaccine shipments by September 1. *For more information, contact Judi Chase,*



What's Next for the Survey of Organizational Excellence.

An agency-wide action plan will be proposed March 26 following on the heels of the 2001-2002 Survey of Organizational Excellence. The TDH response rate for this year's survey was 58%, an agency record, and a significant increase over the 38% response rate for the last survey. The University of Texas has provided TDH with a 1200-page report that has been sectioned and studied. This summary report will be presented to the Executive Team along with an agency-wide implementation plan. Next steps include additional data analysis and formatting for associateship and regional-specific reports. Also, coordination of staff focus groups to validate the results, and finally, a plan to roll-out the results for TDH staff. Results will also be posted online, highlighted in agency newsletters and presented at various management and staff meetings. Implementation efforts at various organizational levels will then continue over the next several months. *For more information, contact Robin Scott, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6114 or e-mail robin.scott@tdh.state.tx.us.*



EMS/Trauma System Strategic Planning.

The Governor's EMS and Trauma Advisory Council (GETAC) has made significant progress on its strategic planning process required by EMS legislation passed during the last legislative session (HB-2446). More than 4100 surveys were mailed to EMS firms, First Responder Organizations, EMS Medical Directors, and Hospitals last fall. An overall 30% return rate was achieved (EMS – 51%; FRO – 23%, MDs – 18%; Hospitals – 62%); the data are currently being analyzed. During its last two series of meetings, GETAC has had public comment on this issue as an agenda item. Six public hearings were conducted around the state (Amarillo, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Harlingen, Nacogdoches, and San Angelo) between March 14 and March 21. GETAC will then hold a weekend retreat to evaluate all of the input received and develop recommendations for where Texas EMS regulation and EMS/trauma systems should be in the year 2010 and how to get there. Finally, at their next meeting, scheduled for May 31, GETAC will hear comment on the draft plan. *For more information, contact Kathryn C. Perkins, Chief, Bureau of Emergency Management, at (512) 834-6700 or e-mail kathy.perkins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Health Steps Process Improvement Plan.

A core team of representatives from HHSC, TDH, and Department of Human Services (DHS) has finalized a process improvement plan -- with stakeholder input -- to address the issues associated with Texas Health Steps (THSteps) and Medicaid Managed Care. Issues were developed by HHSC based on input from workgroups, state agency staff, advisory groups, and external reviewers. To address the plan sub-workgroups have been designated to develop strategies and timelines to address the issues within their topic groups which are: 1) Program Simplification and Coordination, 2) Data Improvement, 3) Access and Education, and 4) Agency Coordination and Planning. These sub-workgroups are composed of provider and advocate members as well as HHSC, TDH, and DHS staff members. The workgroups will meet on a regular basis and will be reporting their progress to the core team. It is anticipated that the work needed to implement the plan will take approximately one year. *For more information, contact Linda Altenhoff, Division Director, THSteps, at (512) 458-7745 or e-mail linda.altenhoff@tdh.state.tx.us.*



X-Ray Technologist Interpreting Patient Film.

On November 9, 2001, the Bureau of Radiation Control (BRC) received a complaint from attorneys representing a medical facility alleging that physicians' names appeared on x-ray diagnosis reports when they had not interpreted the films. An inspector from Region 1 investigated the complaint. The investigation determined that a Medical Radiologic Technologist (MRT) had performed radiographs, and had read and interpreted films taken at several client facilities. Copies of records and reports obtained from facilities indicated that reports were generated and signed by two radiologists. When contacted, they denied reading the films.

Based on results of the investigation, action has been taken to revoke the registration certificate of the x-ray company involved. In addition, administrative penalties have been proposed, and the case has been referred to Professional Licensing and Certification for enforcement action on the technologists' MRT certification. Medicare/Medicaid fraud has also been notified as some of the films involved treatment funded by this program. *For more information, contact Robert Free, at (512) 834-6688, ext 2022 or e-mail robert.free@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Conferences / Training



Biennial Statewide Birth Defects Conference.

The Texas Birth Defects Monitoring Division (TBDMD), the Texas Birth Defects Research Center, Genetics and Case Management Services Division, TDH Region 2/3, and a number of outside agencies and organizations co-sponsored the Biennial Statewide Birth Defects Conference, held in Ft. Worth on March 7-8. Opening the conference were Mark Canfield, Ph.D., Director, TBDMD; Texas Senator Mike Moncrief; James Zoretic, M.D., Medical Director, TDH Region 2/3; Alexis Hathaway, M.D., Director, Tarrant County Health Department; and Jose Cordero, M.D., Director of the new Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, CDC. The topics included registry data patterns, research, prevention, and services, as well as a focused session on Down syndrome. *For more information, contact Mark Canfield, at (512) 458-7232 or e-mail mark.canfield@tdh.state.tx.us.*



10th Annual Conference for Treatment & Supervision of Adult Sex Offenders.

The 10th annual conference for treatment and supervision of Adult Sex Offenders was held in Corpus Christi on February 21-23. The meeting was sponsored by the Council on Sex Offender Treatment, the Correctional Management Institute of Texas, Sam Houston State University, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Nueces County Community Supervision and Corrections Department, Nueces County Juvenile Probation and the Office of the Attorney General. There were approximately 250 attendees from various disciplines including probation and parole officers, treatment providers, victim advocates, child protective services and judges. The conference included information on sex offender assessment and treatment issues, as well as victim and legislative issues. Keynote speaker was Anna C. Salter, who received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice from Harvard University, and is known internationally for her work in the assessment and treatment of sex offenders, victim issues and sexual violence. *For more information, contact Janet Latham, Executive Director, Council on Sex Offender Treatment, Division of Professional Licensing, at (512) 834-4530 or e-mail janet.latham@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Pediatric Hematologists and Sickle Cell Consultants Hosted.

The Division of Genetic Screening and Case Management hosted the annual “Pediatric Hematologists and Sickle Cell Disease Consultants Meeting” on March 5th and the annual “Sickle Cell Disease Case Management Meeting” on March 6th. The consultants to the Newborn Screening Program discussed various aspects of Sickle Cell Disease care and data relating to the outcome of the Newborn Screening Program. The case managers were updated on the various TDH programs that provide services for children with sickle cell disease and were provided information on education and nutrition concerns in children with sickle cell disease. *For more information, contact Margaret Drummond-Borg, Bureau of Children’s Health, Genetics/Case Management Division, at (512) 458-7111 ext. 2193 or e-mail margaret.borg@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Colorado Hepatitis C Prevention Counseling (HCV) Training.

A staff member from the HIV/STD Health Resources Division traveled to Denver, Colorado, to advise the Colorado Department of Health (CHD) on delivering a one-day hepatitis C workshop. CDH modeled the one-day curriculum after the Texas Department of Health’s established Hepatitis C Prevention Counseling curriculum. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535 or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Capacity Building Courses.

The HIV/STD Health Resources Division has added five new courses to its list of training opportunities. “The Perfect Brainstorm,” “Making the Strategic Shift,” “Systems Thinking/Systems Changing,” and “Facilitation for Lasting Change” grew out of contractor needs identified during the Capacity Building Workshop. “Bridging Theory and Practice” focuses on the effective implementation of behavioral intervention theory for HIV prevention. This course was originally taught by instructors from the University of Texas Southwestern in Dallas and has been taken on by HIV/STD Health Resources Division trainers. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535 or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Regional Updates

Public Health Region 1



Commissioner of Health visits Region 1.

Commissioner of Health, Dr. Eduardo Sanchez and TDH Chief Operating Officer Gary Bego visited Region 1 in Lubbock on February 26-28. Dr. Sanchez and Mr. Bego met with Region 1 staff to discuss a variety of issues, including business improvement practices, immunization rates, emergency preparedness, infrastructure, bioterrorism, and public health challenges in rural areas. They also met with legislators, representatives from local health departments, and members of the media. Though Dr. Sanchez had to return to Austin ahead of schedule to meet with the governor, Mr. Bego met with members of the City of Lubbock Health Department and attended a reception held at the Plainview-Hale County Health Department in Plainview. *For more information, contact Dr. Nicolas Curry, Regional Director, at (806) 767-0479 or e-mail nick.curry@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Flu immunizations on the rise.

Staff members in Region 1's Immunizations program have been administering more flu vaccines this season than in last year's flu season. During last year's flu season, stretching from October 2000 to March 2001, Region 1 gave out 2,521 flu shots; however, for only the first three months of this year's flu season, from October to December 2001, TDH staff had already administered 4,410 flu immunizations. This year's flu vaccination rates are expected to be even higher by the time this season's final totals are tabulated. *For more information, contact Shirley Richardson, Immunizations program manager, at (806) 767-0417 or e-mail shirley.richardson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Surveillance survey results presented.

Region 1 staff members traveled to Spur on February 13 to present the results of the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS), which compiles statistics on health factors ranging from smoking to obesity to regular visits to the doctor. A total of 36 members of the community attended the presentation, including three county judges, five local elected officials and representatives from the two local independent school districts. This was the first of six BRFSS reports to be given at counties in Region 1; the other five survey presentations will be scheduled soon. *For more information, contact Peggy Johnson-Roberson, Public Health Promotion regional manager, at (806) 767-0489 or e-mail peggy.roberson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 4 & 5 North



Rusk County Future Search.

As one of the major activities of the Rusk County Pilot Project, a Future Search Steering Committee was formed and has been meeting since January to plan and organize the Rusk County Future Search, which is scheduled for May 13-15. The goal of the Future Search is to answer the question: "How do we improve the health of the people in Rusk County?" Debbye Jarrell, Public Health Nurse in the Henderson Field Office, is leader of the committee. Other members include representatives from Henderson Memorial Hospital and local community leaders. *For more information, contact Debbye Jarrell, Henderson Field Office, at (903) 657-6310 or e-mail debbye.jarrell@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Community Health.

Dreka Strickland participated in the African American Legislative Summit held in Austin on February 7. The Senate Legislative Black Caucus, Texas Department of Health-Office of Minority Health, American Heart Association-Texas Affiliate, and Glaxo-Smith-Kline jointly sponsored this event. The purpose of the summit was the bringing together of African Americans to look at health issues that impact our communities at a grassroots level with the goal being to develop viable recommendations regarding health care reform. Approximately 200 participants from across the state had the opportunity to receive information on health care issues from a panel of experts and present their concerns regarding those issues. *For more information, contact William Oliver, Community Health Services Program Manager, at (903) 533-5388 or e-mail william.oliver@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Community Health.

A flu clinic for senior citizens was held in Kilgore, (Gregg County) on February 13. This was a collaborative event between Texas Medical Foundation, the Area Agency on Aging, Kilgore Senior Center, and the TDH–Rusk County Pilot Project. Dreka Strickland, Regions 4/5 North Regional Minority Health Coordinator, Pete Wilson, Area Agency on Aging, and Brion Oaks, Texas Medical Foundation, coordinated the project. *For more information, contact William Oliver, Community Health Services Program Manager, at (903) 533-5388 or e-mail william.oliver@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Zoonosis Control Program.

On February 7-9, Dr. James Wright attended the Texas Veterinary Medical Association meeting. As chair of the association's Public Health Committee, he facilitated discussions on a variety of food safety and zoonotic disease issues. He attended continuing education sessions on zoonoses and bioterrorism. On February 15, Dr. Wright met with a Texas Animal Health Commission veterinarian to develop a surveillance form and procedures for investigating arthropod-borne encephalitis in Texas. During the month he also attended a lecture on West Nile Virus at the Northeast Texas Veterinary Medical Association in Sulphur Springs and delivered an "Epidemiology of Rabies" presentation at a meeting of the East Texas Academy of Family Practice in Carthage (Panola County). *For more information, contact James Wright, Zoonosis Control Program, at (903) 533-5243 or e-mail james.wright@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 6 & 5 South



Public Health Nursing.

The supervisor of the Liberty County TDH clinic, worked closely with the Local Health Authority, the school nurse and regional immunization program staff to sign up Woodrow Wilson Junior High School located in Dayton in Liberty County as a Vaccine For Children provider. She gave the needed technical assistance and training for all aspects of the program. The school nurse has immunized 102 children since implementation of the program in the school in October. *For more information, contact Sandy O'Keefe, Regional Nursing Program Manager, at (713) 767-3400 or e-mail sandy.okeefe@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 7



Rabies Risk Assessment Lectures.

Throughout January, the Zoonosis Control Program delivered "Rabies Risk Assessment" lectures to human and veterinary health professionals in Region 7. On January 22, twenty-five veterinarians and technicians of the Bluebonnet Veterinary Medical Association earned continuing education credit for attending a two-hour program held in Brenham. On January 25, several hundred nurses and respiratory therapists from throughout Central Texas heard a one-hour lecture. This was delivered at an infectious disease conference hosted by the University of Texas at Tyler and held at Temple Convention Center. Additionally, on January 31, twenty-five physician residents and staff of Scott & White Hospital in Temple attended the program. A Scott & White physician had learned of this program during their introduction to public health visits with Region 7 Zoonosis Control and suggested a formal lecture be offered to all the physician residents. The three

presentations, delivered to diverse stakeholder audiences, are a “firsts” for the Region 7 Zoonosis Control program and serves as the beginning of an initiative to provide health care providers with up-to-date rabies prevention information. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Surplus Equipment Helps Animal Control Stakeholders.

On January 29, Navasota Animal Control (Grimes County) became the first beneficiary of outdated Region 7 equipment in a program sponsored by the Zoonosis Control program. The transfer was made in accordance with TDH policy and procedure and with the help of the Meat Safety Assurance, Materials and Acquisition Management, and Automated Data Systems programs and Regional Administration. A laptop computer, previously destined for surplus, was donated to the Navasota Animal Control Shelter. The City of Navasota will install software on the donated computer to assist animal control officers in documenting the shelter’s population and animals’ final disposition. The Zoonosis Control program perceives that there are numerous animal control agencies in Region 7 that could benefit from surplus TDH computers and furniture. This donation is the first in a regional initiative to improve animal control agency services to citizens in Central Texas. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Oral Rabies Vaccination Program.

For the entire month of January, Region 7 Zoonosis Control program contributed one staff member full-time to the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program. This person provided logistical support and baits inventory maintenance, and traveled to Zapata, Ft. Stockton, and Fredericksburg to perform those duties. Throughout this assignment, the Zoonosis Control personnel in Temple assumed extra investigative, inspection, and customer service work that resulted from the staff member’s absence. Few, if any, other regions, contributed this much for this project. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2450 or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bioterrorism/Emergency Preparedness plans.

Public health nursing staff in the regional sub offices are continuing to be involved in the ongoing coordination, planning, and training process for Bioterrorism/Emergency Preparedness plans in many rural Region 7 counties. Since October 2001, public health nurses have been instrumental in responding to their specific community concerns related to emergency preparedness and developing Bioterrorism plans. In most cases, public health nurses are the primary public health presence in a community and are the first to be contacted about public health issues and events. They have played a critical role in assisting communities to shape and strengthen emergency response plans. *For more information, contact Pat Collins, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2105 or e-mail pat.collins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bastrop Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

The Bastrop EMS Department has volunteered to give immunizations in the Bastrop area, while the Public Health Nurse is out on medical leave. The Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic level personnel will go through an eight-hour training and clinical preceptorship before providing this service. The Bastrop EMS goal is to expand their provision of services to be available on a continual basis to benefit their community. *For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2423 or lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Care Orientation (HCO).

Regional THSteps staff is conducting Health Care Orientation (HCO) Train-the-Trainer sessions with regional Community Based Organizations (CBO) that have volunteered to provide the HCO in their communities to eligible clients. Regional Implementation of this phase of SB 43 began in late January. Eight CBO's in Region 7 will have completed the training process before the March 15 deadline. *For more information, contact Eileen Walker, at (254) 778-6744, ext 2415 or e-mail eileen.walker@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Risk Watch, a national safety program.

EMS regional staff members have been chosen to participate in Risk Watch, a national safety program designed to use schools as a medium for getting the safety message to kids. The program is taught to grades K-8 and is sponsored by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and supported by numerous private and government entities. On March 21, a regional staff person flew to Cambridge, Mass. to participate in a train the trainer program in order to bring the program back to the Central Texas area. This is all done via a grant from NFPA, which was applied for and awarded earlier this year. This program has been in the planning stage for four months and five school districts in Central Texas have agreed to participate. Other agencies that have each supplied one person to be trained are: Austin Fire Department, Bastrop County Constables Office, Region XIII Education Service Center Special Projects, and Texas Department of Insurance Fire Prevention and Outreach Services. The obvious hope is that this program will spread from the five initial school districts throughout the state. The five initial persons will monitor this program and report results to NFPA who will in turn assist in the spread statewide. *For more information, contact Mike Ingraham, at (254) 778-6744, ext 2286 or e-mail mike.ingraham@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Increase in syphilis morbidity in Robertson County.

Since January 1, thirteen newly diagnosed cases of syphilis have been identified in Robertson County. Region 7 HIV/STD Program has increased investigation activities in Robertson County to include calling on the State Rapid Response Team to assist with targeted community screenings, interviews of newly identified cases, and re-interviews of all cases since January 1. Disease Intervention Specialist continues to work closely with Local Health Departments, TDH nursing staff, local physicians, hospitals and contractors to conduct investigations in Robertson County. *For more information, contact Jennifer Schneider, Region 7 HIV/STD Program, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2430 or e-mail jennifer.schneider@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Monitoring of Contacts to Multi- Drug Resistant Cases.

Region 7 Tuberculosis Control Program is currently conducting contact investigation and monitoring 59 contacts to Bi-National Multi-Drug Resistant Cases. These contacts require monitoring, tracking and follow-up for a period of two years. This monitoring includes screening and examination for each contact. To ensure the appropriate follow-up and findings, the regional TB program staff has developed a database specific for gathering this data and also to ensure that follow-up is done at the recommended intervals. We are currently working with the Bi-national programs to ensure that contacts that are identified and reside in Mexico are screened and evaluated. We have had success with El Paso, Juntos and the Bi-national Project in Region 11. *For more information, contact Dana Schoepf, TB Control Program Manager, at (254) 778-6744 or e-mail dana.schoepf@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 8



Preventive Medicine 2002 Conference.

San Antonio hosted the Preventive Medicine 2002 Conference in February. In a major effort to promote healthy lifestyles, the Bexar County Community Collaborative is taking the lead in forming a partnership with a variety of public and private organizations on a Fit City / Fit Schools campaign to increase exercise and improve eating habits. Regional staff are actively involved in this initiative. *For more information, contact Kathy Shields, Public Health Promotions, at (210) 949-2073 or e-mail kathleen.shields@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response activities.

As Texas continues to address Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response activities, Governor Rick Perry accompanied by Dr. Sanchez and Dr. Riggins attended a demonstration on the Lightweight Epidemiology Advanced Detection & Emergency Response System (LEADERS) at Brooks Air Force Base, San Antonio, on February 28. *For more information, contact Dr. Riggins, Director, at (210) 949-2003 or e-mail chip.riggins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



National Disaster Medical System (NDMS).

On March 22, regional staff participated in the San Antonio NDMS mass-care exercise involving twenty-four local hospitals. *For more information, contact Dr. Riggins, Director, at (210) 949-2003 or e-mail chip.riggins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Medical Aspects of Homeland Security.

Regional staff will serve as faculty and participants along with community leaders and military personnel in the Medical Aspects of Homeland Security for Leader and Decision Makers Symposium being held March 26 – 27, at Brooks Air Force Base, San Antonio. *For more information, contact Dr. Riggins, Director, at (210) 949-2003 or e-mail chip.riggins@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Organization of Piedras Negras & Eagle Pass (HOPE).

The Health Organization of Piedras Negras & Eagle Pass (HOPE) Binational Council Meeting was held in February. Regional staff presented topics including Tuberculosis and Emergency Preparedness. *For more information, contact Kassie Curfman, at (830) 278-7173 or e-mail kassie.curfman@tdh.state.tx.us*

Public Health Region 9 & 10



Commissioner's Visit.

On March 6, Dr. Eduardo Sanchez and Dr. Charles Bell visited El Paso to say goodbye to departing Regional Director Dr. Miguel A. Escobedo. While here, they met with Regional Dean of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Dr. Jose Manuel de la Rosa and other faculty members to discuss recruiting J-1 subspecialist physicians for the El Paso campus. (J-1 is a visa waiver that allows physicians who are not U.S. citizens to work in the United States.) As a result of the meeting the participants agreed to work with Dr. Leo Vela of the University of Texas Regional Academic Health Center in Harlingen to consider joint appointments for these subspecialists under Subchapter Z, Chapter 51 of the Education Code amending §51.949. Simultaneously, TDH staff will

investigate: amending this legislation to allow J-1 waivers for academic appointments in other underserved areas; federal legislation to increase the number of J-1 waivers per state; and the possibility of having the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission serve as an interested federal agency that can authorize J-1 waivers. *For more information, contact Gale Morrow, Deputy Director, at (915) 834-7777 or e-mail gale.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Border Health Institute (BHI).

As a result of meetings held with the BHI Board, the Mayor of El Paso's office and the Empowerment Zone of El Paso, the BHI will proceed to submit a letter of intent for Empowerment Zone funding. The letter of intent is due on March 29. The Board will request approximately \$400,000 to support two staff positions (Business Manager and Project Director) and start-up costs. *For more information, contact Gale Morrow, Deputy Director, at (915) 834-7777 or e-mail gale.morrow@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Ten Against TB.

Dr. Miguel Escobedo attended the Ten Against TB (TATB) meeting in McAllen on March 7, representing Dr. Sanchez (Co-chair). The mission of TATB is to improve binational TB control through enhanced collaboration and coordination with our Mexican counterparts. The group was started in 1994 by Dr. David Smith, former Texas Commissioner of Health, and the other border State Health Officers. Texas and Nuevo Leon currently share the duties of Chair, with support from TDH TB Elimination Division (Jose Moreira) and Region 9/10. The recommendations from this meeting include having Co-chairs Drs. Zacarias and Sanchez petition the State Health Officers to have the US/Mexico Border Health Commission assume Executive Committee and policy setting functions for TATB. The TATB Steering Committee will assume a more technical role to support various initiatives (starting with the binational TB card project). *For more information, contact Dr. Miguel Escobedo, at (915) 309-1049 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Presidio Primary Health Care.

TDH staff have been working with the Big Bend Regional Medical Center, area physicians and Texas Tech Odessa to find a primary care physician to serve the community of Presidio. Initially, the intent was to find a J-1 Texas Tech trained physician. Since USDA has withdrawn its support for J-1 waivers, this option is not currently available. Another physician, a U.S. citizen, however, has expressed interest and will be visiting Presidio on March 22. *For more information, contact Laura Greek, at (915) 729-4275 or laura.greek@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 11



Operation Lonestar 2002.

On February 23rd TDH and the military met at the Weslaco, Texas Army National Guard Armory to discuss Operation Lonestar 2002 sites in Hidalgo County colonias north of Mission and east of Edinburg, and a new site southeast of Brownsville in Cameron County.

A public health fellowship with Continuing Medical Education through the Texas State Board of Medical Examiners is in application to allow out-of-state military reserve

physicians practice in Texas alongside the Texas National Guard clinicians. This Operation Lone Star training in setting up field clinics was important in the Houston flood when our Texas Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) was able to get into service days faster than other DMAT units. Operation Lone Star 2002 is scheduled for July 29-August 9. *For more information, contact Ramiro Gonzales, Environmental and Consumer Health Director, at (956) 423-0130 ext 637 or e-mail ramiro.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Web-based Surveillance Pilot.

On February 20, the Regional Director for TDH and Sue Fischer-Hoch, M.D., Professor with University of Texas in Brownsville, School of Public Health (SPH) held a Web-based Surveillance Pilot project meeting at Region 11 headquarters.

A pilot project in web-based syndrome reporting was formalized with Dr Al Zelicoff of Los Alamos Sandia Lab and the SPH in Brownsville. We are the second site in the nation after New Mexico to pilot this de-identified reporting project called Rapid Syndromic Validation Project (RSVP), which provides instant Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. Dr Zelicoff has testified to the US Senate that this kind of reporting will be key to bioterrorism preparedness. *For more information, contact Dr. Brian Smith, Regional Director, at (956) 423-0130 or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*